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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 1507
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 2296
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001434

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XOX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: OPRC KMDR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Yediot reported that DM Ehud Barak presented to Special Envoy George Mitchell a series of demands of the Arab world and the Palestinians in exchange for a temporary settlement freeze -- a Palestinian commitment that the negotiations towards a permanent-status agreement will lead to an end of conflict; Q gestures by Arab states

to normalize relations; an expression of willingness by the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish state; and a Palestinian indication that the negotiations will lead to a demilitarized state. Yediot also reported that PM Benjamin Netanyahu told the EU ambassadors to Israel on June 30 that Qmany Israelis are willing to make many concessions to the Palestinians but that there is one thing they are not disposed to: being Qsuckers. Q Therefore, if someone wants me to freeze settlements, I expect the Palestinians to make concessions in exchange. Q Speaking on Israel Radio this morning, Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon (Yisrael Beiteinu) said that Israel will not freeze natural growth in the settlements and that Israel could not be required to take immediate action while the other side was unwilling to take even one small step. Ayalon told the radio that any move undertaken by Israel concerning the settlements would be part of a regional settlement. He said that Israel and the U.S. view the final status arrangement eye to eye and are continuing to hold talks. Israel Hayom quoted a senior Israeli diplomatic source as saying that the Bark-Mitchell meeting succeeded in allaying fears recently raised at the Prime MinisterQs Office, including an alleged desire by President Obama to topple the Netanyahu government and that Obama planned to impose a regional peace plan on Israel. The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday settler leaders promised to lobby against any concessions that Netanyahu might consider making to the Americans on the issue of settlement construction when he meets with Mitchell in the next few weeks.

The Jerusalem Post reported that visiting Congressman Robert Wexler (D-FL), a Qclose political ally of President Obama and a stalwart Israel supporter, Q told the newspaper yesterday that Israel would lose nothing, and potentially gain everything, by agreeing to a temporary moratorium on construction in the settlements for a short period of time. Wexler was also quoted as saying that the U.S. is urging 22 Arab countries to take significant steps now towards normalization with Israel. HaQaretz quoted a senior source in Jerusalem as saying yesterday that the U.S. administration has not been successful in securing commitments from Arab countries to take steps toward normalizing relations with Israel. The source said President Obama's recent meeting with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia did not produce a commitment to encourage the other Arab states to begin normalization. "In such a situation, the Americans can't continue demanding gestures only from Israel, such as the demand that Israel freeze settlement construction," the source was quoted as saying. In response, a senior White House source said talks with the Arab states are continuing with the aim of obtaining a commitment to make gestures toward Israel, and there is still hope for progress.

Leading media reported that last night PM Netanyahu attended a Fourth of July celebration at the residence of U.S. Ambassador to Israel James Cunningham, and said that the bond between Israel and the U.S. was still strong. The PM declared that the sentiments voiced by President Obama, who said in Cairo last month that his country's bond with Israel was unbreakable, were true. The PM also warned that the world order could break down if tyrannical regimes were to obtain weapons of mass destruction. However, freedom has usually triumphed over repressive regimes, the PM stressed. "The greatest danger facing our world today is that this historical consistency of the triumph and spread of democracy could change if the world's worst regimes acquire the world's most dangerous weapons," he was quoted as saying. Israel Hayom and other media quoted Ambassador Cunningham as saying that the bond between the U.S. and Israel is strong and that the U.S. is committed to the security of Israel and of its citizens.

The media reported that yesterday Iranian delegates walked out of an interfaith conference in Kazakhstan when President Shimon Peres got up to speak. No other delegates left the hall. In his speech, Peres urged King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and other Arab leaders to meet with him to discuss a regional peace initiative. Noting that Abdullah was the author of the Arab peace initiative, Peres declared, "Together, we can realize your vision, the vision of all those who believe in peace and justice." Israel Hayom reported that Sheikh Abdullah Bin Abdulmohsin Al-Turki, the Saudi representative at the conference, responded to PeresQs call by saying: QReligion can contribute to intercultural dialogue, but we do not see positive signs on IsraelQs side regarding cooperation.

HaQaretz reported that Noam Shalit will ask a UN committee on Monday to declare the abduction of his son, Gilad Shalit, by Hamas in 2006 a war crime.

Leading media reported that Amnesty International (AI) has issued a comprehensive, voluminous report condemning Israel and Hamas for their role in Operation Cast Lead. AI accused both sides of carrying out war crimes. The leading news Web site Ynet and Israel Radio responded by saying the operation followed a long period of bombardment of thousands of Israelis, that the Palestinians used civilians as human shields, that the AI report presents a twisted version of the rules of war, and that the IDF strove to minimize loses to civilian lives.

The media reported that yesterday the High Court of Justice yesterday ordered the Israel Defense Forces to press harsher charges against a commanding officer who presided over the shooting of a bound and blindfolded Palestinian detainee last September. The victim, Ashraf Abu Rahmeh, 27, was not seriously hurt. He was detained during a protest against the construction of Israel's security fence in the West Bank. The soldier and officer said they had intended only to frighten him.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, due to rising production costs, the Israel Navy is shelving the Lockheed MartinQbuilt Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) in favor of a German-designed and Israeli-built corvette.

Maariv reported that Israel is late in producing biometric passports, as demanded by the U.S. and EU. In an unrelated development, leading media reported that the interior minister may refuse to extend the passport of an Israeli who is classified as an evader of military service, according to a decision handed down last week by Jerusalem District Court Judge Noam Sohlberg.

Maariv reported that DM Ehud Barak has recently prevented a meeting between Netanyahu and Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi during the past three months.

HaQaretz quoted IDF Chief Rabbi Avichai Ronsky as saying at a conference two weeks ago that women ought not to serve in the army. HaQaretz reported that QOz,Q the newly created task force dealing with illegal immigration, carried out its first raid yesterday, rounding up 300 foreign laborers in Tel AvivQs southern neighborhoods.

HaQaretz reported that the American carrier U.S. Airways is commencing service between the U.S. and Israel. Today it inaugurates a regular line, flying nonstop between Ben-Gurion Airport and Philadelphia.

Mideast:

Block Quotes:

II. "Tough Love"

Senior commentator Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (7/2): QThe United States is a superpower. If the United States wants a broken, battered Israel, it will get a broken, battered Israel. This is a collision between a tank and an ATV, between a stealth bomber and a glider. But the question the White House ought to be asking itself is whether riding roughshod over Israel serves its goals -- whether a crushed Israel is an American interest. The answer is unequivocal: no. Already, Israel's public humiliation is hurting America. It is making even moderate Arabs unwilling to contribute anything to advancing the diplomatic process. And without a significant Arab contribution, there will be no diplomatic process. But a continued tough love policy toward Israel is liable to do damage that is far more serious -- and irreversible. Without a strong Israel, a Middle East peace can neither be established nor survive. Without a strong Israel, the Middle East will go up in flames. The hour is late. Both Obama's government and Benjamin Netanyahu's government have made serious mistakes the last few months. But ultimately, both Obama and

Netanyahu are worthy leaders who want to do the right thing. Therefore, the two must stop the dangerous game they are playing. The time has come to replace tough love with sensible, grown-up love.

II. "Oral Law"

Visiting Professor of Political Science at Haifa University Avraham Ben-Zvi, an expert in U.S.-Israeli relations, wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (7/2): QSecretary of State Hillary ClintonQs latest utterances denying the existence of oral understandings between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon in May 2003 regarding construction in settlements is a cause of amazement. Her approach contradicts the testimony of the Deputy National Security Advisor in the Bush advisor, Elliott Abrams, who has recently confirmed the existence of the understandings that state that Israel was granted an OK to build inside the existing settlements, provided this would not involve the confiscation of Palestinian land or an increase in economic incentives for the settlers. Attempts to minimize the value and significance of oral understandings runs against one of the cornerstones of traditional U.S. diplomacy. Not only have the U.S. leaders believed that even in the complex and subdued global environment, codes of credibility can and must be maintained, but they were also aware of the fact that it is inevitable to anchor all aspects of foreign policy in signed documents. ClintonQs claim that if oral understandings were achieved between the Bush administration and the Sharon government, they do not obligate Obama, is problematic too. Those remarks are akin to turning a blind eye to the continuity of written or oral treaties, agreements, and understandings that are supposed to persist beyond the term of any administration.

III. "Without Any Tricks"

Shaul Arieli, a member of board of the Council for Peace and Security and one of the founders of the Geneva Initiative, wrote in HaQaretz (7/2): QIn negotiations on a final-status agreement, it would be possible to reach understandings with the United States and the Palestinians on the completion of projects that are almost finished -- for instance, in Ma'aleh Adumim -- and new construction within the built-up areas of certain settlements, mainly Modi'in Illit and Betar Illit, which about the Green Line. But to demand more than that in exchange for Netanyahu's speech at Bar-Ilan University -- for instance, the trick of relocating Migron settlers to Adam or Qhigh-rise constructionQ -- looks like an attempt to put one over on the Americans. And the Americans are quite familiar with the Sasson and Spiegel reports on the settlements and outposts.

IV. "The Main Thing Is That There Was a Speech"

Liberal columnist Uzi Benziman wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (7/2): QThe relations of hostility between Israel and the Arab world, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is among them, will not be resolved in a retail approach; to resolve them, comprehensive and energetic root canal treatment must be taken. The American President's speech at Cairo University ostensibly recognized this and ostensibly heralded the intent to handle the challenge this way. But in practice, the U.S. administration is nitpicking with Israel and with the Palestinians over words and numbers (what is Qnatural growthQ and how many refugees will realize the Qright of returnQ). Ehud Barak returned from Washington pleased (that, in any case, is the pose he is trying to convey) because, ostensibly, there appear to be understandings over the extent of construction in the settlements, and Abu Mazen leaves his meeting in the White House happy because the President expressed adherence to the Roadmap and promised to act to remove roadblocks in the West Bank. With the current American approach, the handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been converted into small change and a dynamic of procrastination and floundering is developing that succeeded, for 42 years, in dissolving all the initiatives to resolve it.

IV. QMitchell-Barak

Editor-in-Chief Amnon Lord wrote in the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (7/2): QAssuming that Israel and the United States will soon conclude the affair [of settlement construction], one can expect harsher stages to appear in the future on the diplomatic agenda. Obama showed the Palestinians that they donQt need to do anything, chiefly not enter negotiations with the government of Israel. It looks as if he views the QsolutionQ of the conflict as the imposition of moves on Israel exclusively -- as Israel is supposed to get something in exchange from the Arab states, not from the Palestinians. It will be very difficult to manage the next moves without reaching a crisis between the two countries. Israel must already engage in propaganda moves ahead of the coming confrontations with the Obama administration.

CUNNINGHAM